



Hon. Robert T. Matsui

Member of Congress

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Robert T. Matsui
Serving California's 5th District

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MATSUI: WE CAN DO MORE FOR WIDOWS

WASHINGTON, DC—Today, Ranking Member of the Ways and Means Social Security Subcommittee Robert T. Matsui (D-CA) joined Democratic Whip Nancy Pelosi (D-CA) to urge Congress to pass substantial Social Security benefit improvements for widows. Today, the House is scheduled to take up H.R. 4069 on the suspension calendar. This bill, introduced by Reps. Shaw and Matsui, will help approximately 120,000 women nationwide by adjusting outdated technical provisions of the Social Security program. While Democrats support H.R. 4069, many believe we can and should do more to help widows. But by bringing H.R. 4069 up on suspension, Republicans are not allowing any amendments. The bill is expected to pass by a wide margin.

"H.R. 4069 is a small first step, and I am glad to support it. But it simply does not do enough to help elderly widows, who are the most vulnerable of all Social Security beneficiaries," said Matsui. "That's why I have introduced a broader bill, which includes the provisions of H.R. 4069, but also creates a new widow's guarantee. The poverty rate among widows is double that of other Social Security beneficiaries. We can and should do more to help them."

Matsui's bill, H.R. 4671, the **Social Security Widows Benefit Guarantee Act of 2002** would expand benefits for 5 million widows. It would increase widows' and widowers' benefits to 75% of the combined benefits the couple had been receiving prior to the death of one spouse. This is higher than what they receive under current law, which limits the widow to between 50 and 67 percent of what the couple had been receiving prior to the death of a spouse. In a typical case, the widow's benefit would rise by 12 percent, or more than \$100 per month. H.R. 4671 has more than 130 cosponsors and is awaiting action in the Ways and Means Committee. Matsui offered a similar bill as an amendment before the Social Security Subcommittee, but it was defeated on a party-line vote on April 25, 2002. More than 150 women's groups across the country support Matsui's legislation.

"It's a simple question of priorities. According to my Republican colleagues, we can provide tax cuts for very affluent individuals and big corporations. They believe we can offer billions in retroactive tax breaks to a handful of companies – including Enron – but we can do nothing to help impoverished widows who cannot afford to wait," commented Matsui. "And if Republicans succeed in privatizing Social Security, we will have to cut benefits, not expand them. That's why it is so important that we pass a substantial widow's bill today."

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